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# Berichte und Kommentare

## Representations of Kinship

### Agnatic Ideology and Uterine Values a Berber-Speaking Tribe (South-East Morocco)

Marie-Luce Gélard

Kinship studies conducted in Moslem societies almost invariably concentrate on the Arab system of kinship and marriage, although this is not the only system within the Moslem sphere of influence. Other conceptions exist, both similar and different, such as the representations derived from the fundamental narrative of the Ait Khebbach tribe, a Berber-speaking group established in South-East Morocco. Their perceptions of origin provide the material for a new approach to the paradigm that opposes agnation (Arab) and cognation (Berber)<sup>1</sup>.

All Moroccan Berber groups have adopted the Arab system of kinship based principally on agnation<sup>2</sup> in which kinship rests exclusively on patrilineage. The Ait Khebbach have adopted agnate ideology but allusions to uterine ties of kinship are frequent too, as the different configurations of kinship prove.

Symbolic representations are particularly visible in the social fiction of a group, especially its genesis and the related founding myth. The Ait Khebbach live in a society that is penetrated by such a myth. This happens to be an exceptional analytical tool with which to gather information on a system of values, representations and cultural practises that remain valid even today. The aim of this study is to discover where reality meets with myth and the circumstances in which ideological construction and social practices overlap. The author studies the way symbolic representations reflect different levels of kinship - ties of blood (through males) as opposed to ties of milk (through females) - and investigates the typical Berber form of kinship through aggregation.

In the fundamental myth, the Ait Khebbach doubly assert an attachment to uterine values, by relating first the ancestry and then the marriage of their founder. This is followed by a biographical panegyric in which the hero becomes a sort of incarnation of paternal power (agnate values). Then mythical discourse on the destiny of the eponym gradually launches into contemporary determinisms of milk kinship in which women play an essential part.

Representations of kinship therefore oscillate between agnate ideology and an attachment to uterine ties. The author proposes to investigate this permanent alternation from one value to the other.

## The Ait Khebbach tribe

The Ait Khebbach belong to the powerful Ait Atta confederation. Originally they were nomads (*rhal*) and ranked among the most accomplished voyagers on the long transsaharan routes leading from Morocco to Mali across the Sahara. They controlled the Tafilalt oasis, seat of the famous Berber kingdom of Sijilmasa<sup>3</sup> and, for centuries, had also protected the caravans (*ichabarn*) of Drâa, Touat and Tafilalt. In the course of the 20th century the tribe (*taqbilt*) started to adopt a sedentary way of life. Before the Protectorate, men whose values corresponded to their nomadic way of life, travelled freely, the only demarcations of space being the tracks of nomadic routes. This period is remembered as a time of great freedom in the collective memory. In drawing up and imposing the Moroccan-Algerian frontier, the colonial authorities deprived the Ait Khebbach tribe of two thirds of their pastoral land,

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<sup>1</sup> The term cognate refers to a group of individuals related through ties of blood, whether on the male or the female side.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Khaldun in the XIVth century (Ed. Geuthner, 1925) and W. Robertson Smith (1885) note however that uterine kinship does exist in the Arab system of kinship. For further information see Conte (1991, 1994 and 2001) and Bonte (2000).

<sup>3</sup> The kingdom of Sijilmasa, founded in the VIIIth century by the Miknaça Berbers, was to become one of the largest metropolitan centres of the Sahara. Its commercial, political and religious influence (Kharijite Islam) lasted for nearly seven centuries. In the XIth century, the historian El-Bekri (1068) described the history of this kingdom. See also Jacques-Meunie (1982) and Mezzine (1987).

forcing them to gradually abandon their nomadic existence. And the process was accelerated by the Moroccan Algerian border disputes<sup>4</sup> of the 1940-60 period, when their caravan routes were declared "prohibited areas". Then, in the 70's, came the Moroccan barrage building policy which deprived the tribe of a large portion of the water resources upon which they relied to pursue their new agricultural mode of life.

Within a century, this ancient power of warring nomads found itself forced to settle and eke out a precarious existence within the bounds of a much shrunken territory subjected to adverse climatic conditions.

Today, the Ait Khebbach, nomads and sedentary populations alike, mostly live close to the Moroccan-Algerian frontier in the Ziz valley, particularly in the Pre-Sahara region of Merzouga<sup>5</sup>.

### The Foundation Myth And Uterine Kinship

All versions of the tribe's foundation myth<sup>6</sup> adopt the same narrative form and all relate the biography of the eponym ancestor, the constitution of his descent group and finally their choice of a place in which to settle. This myth, like the fundamental narratives of other Berber-speaking tribes from the South and the Moroccan Atlas region, is constructed around three main themes: the ancestor (endowed with the virtues of wisdom), the dispersal (tribal wanderings<sup>7</sup>) and lastly the reunification and geographical implantation of the group.

The narrative<sup>8</sup> invariably begins with the supernatural appearance of the Khebbach<sup>9</sup> ancestor, a hero who arrives from nowhere so to speak. "He was found; no one knew where he came from" or, he had lost his way, in which case his maternal ancestry is mentioned. There is never any indication of who his father was. "A woman left her children and one of them got lost." (*Yat tmtut tudja ichiran ns izl yan dichsn*). The ancestor's mother supposedly descended from Idriss I<sup>10</sup>. This made her a descendant of the Prophet (*shurfa*, masculine *shrif*)<sup>11</sup>. "The woman who lost her child was an Idrissid". From the very beginning, the mother's prestigious ancestry is associated with the founder's *baraka* (good fortune), a sort of divine benediction inherited from his mother.

While all sources, male and female, agree that Khebbach was found, opinions vary as to the gender of his adoptive parent. Some versions are neutral: "Someone found him". In other more precise versions, the infant was taken in and raised by a man named Ouaiza or Yahiya, or else by a woman from the Saghro jebel (which is the one and only precise geographic reference). It is curious to find these two narrative versions, the one with a male and the other with a female figure. "He was adopted by the Sheik Ait Sdrat", "He stayed with a man until he became of age", or "He was raised by a woman and grew up with her", "As a small child he was taken in by a woman."

Considering the kinship system of the group being studied, the adoption theme<sup>12</sup> is significant. Malekite law, as we know, rejects adoption<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> In 1963, Moroccans and Algerians waged the "war of the sands" (*tanaght n-talght*) over frontiers drawn up by the colonial power. There has, as yet, been no settlement of the conflict as Morocco still has to ratify the convention on territorial limits.

<sup>5</sup> Merzouga, a village that has existed for just over 100 years, is situated in a desert region bordering the Sahara, 35 km south-east of Rissani (Tafilalt) and 50 km from Erfoud. Its population of approximately 1100 inhabitants, principally stock breeders and date producers, are all members of the Ait Khebbach tribe.

<sup>6</sup> The author will not examine in any detail its various themes such as the mystery of their ancestry or breast-feeding by males.

<sup>7</sup> Provoked by enemies, or due to famine, drought, invasions of locusts, birds etc.

<sup>8</sup> Despite the many varied narratives, when oral accounts tally, whenever they form a stable, homogenous narrative, this will be referred to in the singular as "the narrative", while the plural will indicate the body of texts proposed by the various narrators.

<sup>9</sup> Fundamental narratives have one central theme: the *khebbach* ethnonym. In the Berber dialect spoken on the study site (*tamazight*), the term *khebbach*, literally means to scratch, to draw on the ground, and serves to introduce the myth. The narration begins with something like the following dialogue between the founder and a passer-by (male or female): "What are you doing?" (*may tschrd?*). And the reply: "I am scratching?" (*kn khbbach*).

<sup>10</sup> In 786, Idriss I fled from Arabia where the Prophet's descendants were being massacred and took refuge in Volubilis (Morocco). Ibn Khaldoun (1925, volume II: 209) writes: "Upon reaching the Maghreb, Idris I, descendant of El-Hacen, the son of El-Hacen (grandson of Mahomet), rid the land of every trace of the Jewish, Christian and pagan religions and put an end to the independence of these tribes". Idriss I extended his authority by concluding alliances with many Berber tribes. The Idrissid dynasty remained in power from 788 to 1055. The appendix to volume II (Ibn Khaldoun, 1925) is a mine of information on this historic figure.

<sup>11</sup> The *shurfa* are the descendants of a saint.

<sup>12</sup> The Berber word meaning to adopt a child, *iskhatrt*, also conveys the notion of its being brought up..

The ancestor is usually said to have then married the daughter of his adoptive father/mother. The girl was an Idrissid. Thus Khebbach married a woman from the same dynasty as his mother. It is clear that their prestigious genealogy is acquired through uterine linkages. In other words, the Ait Khebbach claim to be Idrissids through the tribe's ancestral mother and grandmother<sup>14</sup> (uterine ties). Yet according to the Arab system of kinship, filiation within the tribe is exclusively patrilineal. The redoubled hereditary prestige is a matrilineal acquisition. Direct references to uterine filiation appear frequently and consistently in their accounts of ancestry, besides which one claim to Idrissid affiliation seems to rival the other. The historic prestige of the Khebbach marriage is regarded as less important than the *baraka* (good luck) inherited from his mother and passed on to his wife. This latter is described as being continually hungry<sup>15</sup>: "She ate lots of dates and five or six flat loaves a day". Then, after her marriage, "she ate half a loaf and that was enough."

In 1941, G. Marcy lengthily described what he called the "juridical remnants" of the old Moroccan Berber family system, based on uterine kinship.

It should also be noted that the founder of the tribe lived with his wife's family and never created a home of his own. In the sense that the couple resided on the wife's territory, this was a uxori-local marriage. Today, however, regardless of whether they lead nomadic or sedentary lives, the Ait Khebbach contract viri-local marriages,

To summarize, the founding myth of the Ait Khebbach centres on the founder's female ancestors. His only affiliation is through his mother and he contracts a uxori-local marriage. References to ties of uterine kinship concern (1) the group's claim to religious ancestry through the ancestor's mother who came from a *shurfa* family, and (2) the sacred inheritance which was passed down via the wife of Khebbach. Plainly these are matrilineal ties. As regards local representations, it is interesting to note that current agnate ideology (the Arab<sup>16</sup> system of kinship) coexists with a cognate system, the presence of which is betrayed by references to uterine values (the Berber system of kinship) in the fundamental narrative.

Writing on the subject of Moorish and Tuareg societies, P. Bonte (1995-1996: 58) distinguishes between a mythical age when the group's lineage passes down through female ancestors, and a political age where power is transmitted through male positions. The myth "fixes a decisive moment in the historic process of transforming a cognate medieval Berber society of the Western Sahara into an agnate Moorish society". However, in the case of the Ait Khebbach, it seems more appropriate to speak of a combination of the two systems rather than of a structural transformation from a cognate into an agnate system. In fact, the narratives themselves alternately exploit uterine and agnatic values, thereby invalidating the theory that there are two conflicting modalities of kinship, the male and the female.

On the other hand, the agnatic reference dominates in subsequent narratives which set forth the Khebbach lineage. Discourse is still situated in a mythical age.

### **Emergence Of The Group And Agnatic Values**

Before his marriage, Khebbach was a herdsman, as befits a nomad. "He grew up and became goatherd for the whole region. Herd owners gave him a goat each year, so he had many goats." The ancestor is also endowed with magnified supernatural powers. Oumzouar, the owner of one flock that Khebbach took out to graze, refused to pay him, The goatherd, so it goes, asked God to prevent that tribe (the Ait Oumzouar) from multiplying beyond the number of dates his bag could contain. The story is that this tribe died out. A tribe's survival and its power are believed to depend on the size of that tribe.

Khebbach then fathers four sons: Amar, Arjdel, Alhyane and Azulai. There is no further mention of the founder's wife and adoptive parents after this enumeration. Narratives concentrate on tribal wars and the founder's glorious feats of arms. Family referents are few and explicitly correlated with the

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<sup>13</sup> In practice, things are not so clear-cut. According to Conte (1991: 88): "Those passages in the Koran that are quoted in support of the law prohibiting adoption (XXXIII, 4-5) and elective germanity (XXXIII, 6) do not categorically condemn such practices".

<sup>14</sup> Symbolically, Khebbach is the established father of the tribe.

<sup>15</sup> The provision of nourishment is a recurrent theme in the legends and tales of the Ait Khebbach and of many other populations.

<sup>16</sup> The Arab system of kinship rests on agnation, as has been stated previously. But such a statement needs to be toned down considering that the Arab system is not devoid of references to uterine values and that these are reintroduced via ties of kinship based on milk (*ridā'a*) as Conte has shown (1991 and 1994) in connection with ancient Arabs. See also Héritier (1994) and Bonte (1994, 1999 and 2000).

paternal figure<sup>17</sup>. The father no longer works. He is a warrior<sup>18</sup>. The group is constituted, but has to assert its existence and defend its territory. Henceforth the narrative relates their successive changes of location to search for food, thieve and pillage, etc. This warmongering family group is perpetually on the move. The territory over which Khebbach and his sons exert their influence is imagined as an immense open space where the only obstacles are alien populations needing to be conquered. In other words, while the sons submit to their father's authority, they spend the greater part of their time defending themselves against a host of adversaries or picking quarrels with their neighbours.

Most narrations mark a narrative break to establish the passage from myth to history. The plot devised by Alhyane and Azulai to kill their brother Arjdel<sup>19</sup> serves such a purpose. Arjdel is disabled and a handicap to the group in combat. "In times of war he was a burden to the others because he couldn't run. They decided to kill him." Having been informed by his youngest son Amar of what was afoot, the father intervenes and the plot fails. After this attempted assassination<sup>20</sup>, the father distributes blessings or curses, as the case may be, upon his sons. Amar receives a special form of the founder's baraka, namely the power to convince through speech (*awal*). Arjdel receives the gift of clairvoyance<sup>21</sup>. "He sees his attackers before they are upon him." In battle, such a gift compensates for his disability. The other two brothers receive curses. The fratricidal plot earns severe eye defects (blindness in one eye, a squint, etc.) for Azulai's children and for Alhyane, a far from abundant progeny. In addition to which neither will ever succeed in accumulating wealth. According to local belief, a curse placed on one's descendants is equivalent to depriving that person of every possibility of attaining power and prestige.<sup>22</sup>

Once he has laid blessings or curses upon his sons, the founding ancestor disappears and the biographical narrative ends there.

Each of the founding fractions in the Ait Khebbach tribe today trace their ancestry back to one of the four Khebbach sons. Fractions are referred to as *ighs* (pl. *ighsan*) the literal translation of which is the bone<sup>23</sup>, the kernel, an explicit reference to patrilineage. In his study on the Seksawa, a Berber-speaking group located in the Upper Atlas, J. Berque (1955) notes the central and deterministic nature of the *ikhs*<sup>24</sup> notion which he defines as an agnate group.

According to representations, only living descendants of the eponymous ancestor's four sons belong to the Ait Khebbach tribe. Integration of non-indigenous fractions did not take place until later and there is a formal distinction between endogenous or *ighsan* fractions (the four sons of Khebbach) and exogenous fractions. On the political level, for instance, the more recent aggregated groupings called "*unna ighrsn*", literally "the throat cutters", cannot hold office as tribal head (*amghar n-ufellah*) nor as the representative of a fraction. Khebbach's sons are positioned by order of preference as follows: Amar, Arjdel, Azulai and Alhyane. This order never varies and today individuals correlate the actual state of the tribe<sup>25</sup> with the respective positions of the four Khebbach sons. "Amar was loved by his father, which is why today the Ait Amar families are more prosperous. The Irjdeln are neither rich

<sup>17</sup> The narratives also mention that Khebbach had a preference for Amar, his youngest son. "Khebbach gave him a cup of milk each day." The father's nurturing function can be compared to the theme of male breast feeding studied by Lionetti (1988). Similarly, Roux (1967: 56) reports, on the subject of various Muslim mystical cults that: "As an infant, Sultan Veled slept in the arms of the Master. To calm the child this latter put it to suck at his breast. As a reward for such compassion, God ordered pure milk to flow from the breast."

<sup>18</sup> Descriptions of the Ait Khebbach invariably present the tribe as a group of powerful nomads who have gained the allegiance of most inhabitants of the Tafilalt oasis.

<sup>19</sup> Each child is described by a distinctive physical characteristic. Thus Arjdel the cripple, Azulai the squinter, Alhyane the bearded one and Amar who has the blessings of heaven.

<sup>20</sup> In some versions the conspirators also planned to kill Arjdel in order to seize the she ass (*taghiult*) on which he relied to move from place to place. Even today, asses are regarded as a sign of wealth and used by women in the daily transportation of water whereas the poorer families use only handcarts (*coreta* in Arabic).

<sup>21</sup> There is a parallel between this gift of clairvoyance and the fascination La Kahina (a soothsayer) exerted in the VIIth century, a mythical and historic figure of Berber resistance to Arab invasions. "Her gift of divination enabled her to predict the turn of every important event. This finally earned her the position of high commander." (Ibn Khaldun, 1925, vol. III: 193).

<sup>22</sup> The ability to beget is an absolute social necessity for men and women.

<sup>23</sup> Marcy (1936: 962) also notes that ancient Semites equated the bone with agnation.

<sup>24</sup> The spelling varies considerably from author to author and according to the method of transcription. Marcy (1941: 192) writes : *ighes*, Aspinion (1937: 20) suggests : *irhs* and Westermack (1917: 32) notes *irrs*

<sup>25</sup> Mythical discourse reflects the demographic composition of fractions today. Of a sampling of 400 individuals, 19.5% belong to the Ait Amar fraction, 14.25% to the Irjdeln fraction, 5.25% to the Izulain fraction and only 1% to the Ilhyane fraction. The remaining percentage corresponds to non-indigenous fractions having joined the group at a later date. The Arjdel, Azulai and Alhyane groupings are named after the ancestor of lineal descent. Irjdeln, Izulain and Ilhyane refer to the group as a whole.

nor poor but they are valiant warriors. The father cursed Izulain and Ilhyane which is why they are a group of poor families." According to representations, the numerical capacity of a fraction is overrated

The narrative then proceeds to recount the multiple tribal aggregations that have taken place. The tribe is composed of a large number of non-indigenous fractions as the result of a policy which accepted outside populations for purposes of strategic warfare, mainly to defend their territory.

Having examined uterine references in those episodes of the founding myth that relate the origin and marriage of the eponymous ancestor, it now remains to look at ritual modes of aggregating outside groups which explicitly refer to the notion of uterine kinship.

### **The Aggregation Of Outsiders: "Elective" Kinship**

Aggregation of non-indigenous groups takes place in one of two ways<sup>26</sup>. Firstly, through the performance of a ritual sacrifice by the outside group in favour of one of the four lineal fractions, this latter being free to accept or reject the outsiders. Protection or *debiha* as it is called in Arabic, is the act by which a group places itself under the perpetual protection of a fraction or a tribe. The Ait Khebbach refer to the pact of protection as the "sacrifice/throat cutting on" (*ighras ghur*). In other words they name the act of sacrificing an animal to the group being solicited. Fractions having become part of the tribe through the ritual protection sacrifice are called in Berber "*unna ighrsn*", meaning literally those who have sacrificed.

A colactation pact, which is the second method of aggregation, is equivalent to complete integration. Foreign groups are united with an endogenous fraction through ties of milk kinship, thereby reintroducing the role of uterine ties.

In the narratives, the adopted ones, i.e. those who have sacrificed, are presented as dependent on one of the four *ighsan*. "*Ur id ichirran n-Khebbach, ntta ghursn ghufs*" (They are not the sons of Khebbach, they have sacrificed). Discourse is very different in the case of fractions united by a group colactation pact, as we shall now see from the examples of two non-indigenous fractions, the Ait Adiya and the Ait Tghla, and from the Arab Beni M'Hamed tribe.

### **Colactation Pacts: The Role of Women**

According to C. Agabi (1994:2047), "colactation has been universally practised by Berbers" for centuries<sup>27</sup> and was used by La Kahina in the VIIth century to adopt one of her young captive warriors (Khaled ibn Yezid).<sup>28</sup>

After the battle of Meskiana at which La Kahena's Berber troops defeated the Arab emir H'asan, La Kahena adopted one of the Arab captives of the day. This was the beautiful young Khaled to whom, according to Bayân, she said: "You are the most beautiful and courageous man I have ever seen. I want to give you my milk. In that way you will become the brother of my two sons"<sup>29</sup>. For us Berbers, the kinship of milk bestows a reciprocal right of inheritance" (G. Marcy, 1936: 967).

Usually colactation is used for strategic reasons to establish a relative state of social peace between rival groups.

There are several ways of concluding a colactation pact. Either the heads (*imgharn*) of the two fractions gather and exchange a recipient filled with the milk of seven nursing mothers from each fraction, or (2) drink the milk of an animal<sup>30</sup> from a cup that is passed between them, while the women of the two fractions exchange infants at the breast. In both instances, the presence of women is essential to guarantee the tie of milk kinship.

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<sup>26</sup> Elective kinship is a term borrowed from Conte (1991: 55) and covers adoption by ties of blood (*tabanni*) and milk (*ridâ'a*) and pacts of siblinghood.

<sup>27</sup> Colactation pacts also exist in the Arab world (*ridâ'a*).

<sup>28</sup> Camps (1992:133) notes the interest of Arab chroniclers who "ponder the destiny of Khaled ibn Yezid, a high-ranking warrior whom La Kahina simultaneously held hostage and treated as her adopted son."

<sup>29</sup> According to Ibn Khaldun (1999, vol. I: 214): "Upon her return home, La Kahena adopted the prisoner Khaled as her third son and continued to reign over Ifrikia and to govern Berbers for five years."

<sup>30</sup> Usually camel's milk (*agho n-talghomt*) the noblest of all, according to the Ait Khebbach, or goat's milk (*agho n-taghat*) regarded as the most like maternal milk. In the rare cases of hypogalacty recorded in Merzouga village, new-born babies are fed on goat's milk and called "the goat's children" (*ichirn n-taghat*). The Ait Khebbach carefully avoid co-nursing to which Moors and Tuaregs often resort, and an infant is put out to nurse only when its life seems to be in danger. Consequently, colactation is essentially a group practice destined to create a bond between two tribes.

The oral narratives of the Ait Khebbach describe both procedures. The first such description concerns a pact concluded between two non-indigenous fractions, the Ait Tghla and the Ait Adiya<sup>31</sup>. The second is a pact concluded between the Beni M'Hamed tribe and all the endogenous fractions. Whenever one non-indigenous fraction, the Ait Tghla, refers to the other, the Ait Adiya, they say: "There is a milk bond between us, we do not marry into their group and they do not marry into ours." The colactation pact consisted of "mixing milk" (*tassurt n-ogho*) to clinch the bond of milk kinship between the two groups.

The elders of the tribe describe the colactation pact with the Beni M'Hamed as surpassing all others. "Forty of our women took part and there were as many Ben M'Hamed women. After collecting the milk of the Ait Khebbach and the Beni M'Hamed women, the two were mixed and every baby drank it. That made them all brothers." Milk kinship becomes effective after absorbing just one small drop of the substance. As F. Hérítier (1994: 155) has pointed out, Islamic jurists consider "that a milk kinship is created after an infant has drunk on five occasions from a recipient containing maternal milk[...]". The Ait Khebbach maintain that a single drop of milk is enough. For example, the accidental ingestion of a minimal quantity can seriously affect maternal lactation, and may even cause a milk transfer<sup>32</sup>. Thus any domestic animal that has given birth to young in the house of a mother whose child is not yet forty days old is liable to provoke a milk transfer. If, for instance, a female cat or a bitch laps up a drop of maternal milk in the baby's vomit, milk passes from the mother into the mammals of that animal. To restore the flow of milk gifts of food are necessary and if the mother's breasts are to swell again, she must personally hand a piece of bread or meat to every nursing female.

However that may be, women play a decisive part in colactation pacts concluded between fractions, as their ceremonial staging shows.

Most descriptions of the ritual date back to the colonial period.<sup>33</sup> Authors describe at some length the random drawing of sandals<sup>34</sup>, whereas they barely mention another essential and simultaneous part of the ritual, namely the exchange of breast-fed babies between the two groups of women. Thus, as M. Lesne points out later (1966: 144-145):

Ancient pacts, sealed by the milk ceremony (couscous sprinkled with maternal milk eaten at a communal feast, and the exchange of breast-fed infants throughout the event), establish a total brotherhood which is sworn to by a different number of conjurers at a collective oath-taking ceremony.

J. -L. Duclos (1967) also remarks on the frequency of colactation pacts within the Ait Atta confederation<sup>35</sup>, noting that every person has a tie of milk kinship with someone else.

Colactation pacts concluded by the Ait Khebbach always refer to either maternal milk or the presence of nursing mothers. The most usual ritual procedure seems to be the exchange of babies at the breast.

Colactation pacts are no longer an established contemporary practice, although they continue to have an effect on current matrimonial practices.

### Matrimonial Proscriptions and the Milky Substance

The pact that seals a binding alliance also introduces equally rigorous matrimonial restraints. Representations of milk kinship immediately bring to mind a strict matrimonial injunction; milk is similar to a frontier. People united by a colactation pact<sup>36</sup> will say: "We have milk between us". Thus, the restraints imposed by milk kinship are equivalent to those applying to blood relations, a fact that many authors have underlined (F. Hérítier, 1994 and 1996; P. Bonte, 1994; E. Conte, 1991 and S. Altorki, 1980).

In the case of the Ait Khebbach, the proscription crystallizes around the expression *tafergant*, plural *tiferganin*, meaning closed, fenced off. Intermarriage is forbidden between *tiferrganin* fractions. The

<sup>31</sup> Whom the Ait Tghla call the "foster Ait Adiya" (*n-ogho*). The two groups are considered "foster brothers" (*aitmaten s-ogho*).

<sup>32</sup> An abrupt drying up of the mother's milk which transits to the breasts of another woman. Few ethnologists seem to have investigated the reasons for a milk transfer and literature on the subject is rare. Nonetheless fears of such a transfer are not unusual with the Ait Khebbach, especially after a childbirth.

<sup>33</sup> Aspinion (1937); Bruno and Bousquet (1946); Coursimault (1917); De Foucauld (1885); Marcy (1936 and 1941); Surdon (1936). And closer to our time, Lesne (1966) and Duclos (1967).

<sup>34</sup> The process consists of assembling the two tribal groupings wishing to unite. Each man removes the sandal of his right foot and places it before the chief of his group. When everyone has taken a shoe off, the head of each group selects a shoe and the owners of the two shoes are considered foster brothers.

<sup>35</sup> The Ait Khebbach belong to the Ait Atta confederation.

<sup>36</sup> Hérítier (1994: 159) indicates that within two generations, the "male intake transmitted by women and the female intake transmitted by men" are effaced. This does not apply to the group being studied since the matrimonial proscription between fractions united by a colactation pact is permanent..

word *tifergant* also designates an enclosure close to the tent in which unweaned young are kept until the herds return from grazing. The enclosure is used to protect females and their young. To put it metaphorically, the matrimonial proscription imposed by the ties of milk kinship can be compared to two fenced off spaces needing to be kept apart.

G. Marcy (1936: 971) has commented on the spatial consequences of the *tâd'a* (colactation pact)<sup>37</sup>: The conclusion of an alliance has the effect of delineating a space around the tent of any party to that alliance, a magic zone within which his brother, who is likewise protected by the all powerful *tâd'a*, may touch nothing without bringing upon himself a terrible celestial punishment unless he has permission from the owner.

Transgression (*tafergant*) results in a series of physical sanctions imposed on the two offenders, on their children, or on the respective patrimony of the two families. In fact, whenever a *tafergant* union takes place, close relatives always note a considerable decrease in the prosperity of the two families. In one recent example, a herd of dromedaries belonging to the husband's family was decimated within a few months.

From the point of view of terminology, although the word *tafergant* does indeed refer to a matrimonial proscription, it explicitly applies only to fractions united by a colactation pact. The word has two meanings since it is used to designate a matrimonial proscription and an enclosure reserved for suckling animals. In other words, there is a close connection between the feminine world and the proscription that derives from milk kinship, firstly because the previously established pact could not have been concluded without the presence of women, and secondly because a linguistic parallel associates this proscription with the enclosure set aside for females with their young.

In both instances, representations of the milky substance clarify these perceptions. Milk is regarded as a sort of autonomous entity which requires and organizes separation.

When all is said and done, milk kinship is a purely uterine mode of affiliation, especially since, the Ait Khebbach regard the milky substance as a uniquely female product.

In the fundamental narrative, the most effective procedure for voluntary aggregation of outside groups into the tribal unit appears to be through milk. Fractions integrated through the sacrificial ritual of protection have neither the same status nor the same social position as fractions integrated through colactation. The *ait maten s-ogho* are now relatives (milk kinship) and an accepted part of the tribe whereas although the *unna ighrsn* belong to the tribe as a whole they are regarded as ancient protégés and remain a non-indigenous group. As the expression "milk is stronger than blood" (*agho ichqa ugar idamn*) indicates in connection with the begetting of children, in terms of actual effectiveness maternal milk is over-determined to the detriment of animal blood.

Thus the fundamental narrative ends by acknowledging that integration of the non-indigenous groups which are part of the tribe today, depended mainly on uterine kinship.

## Conclusion

The fundamental narrative of the Ait Khebbach alternately casts male and female ancestors as the principle actors in their mythology. The enigmatic account of the hero's origin (his maternal lineage and a uxori-local marriage) restate the group's attachment to uterine values, while descendants of the eponym ancestor assert agnation and exclusively masculine filiation. Originally, the tribal group was composed of the founder's direct descendants. Then, by creating ties of milk kinship, non-indigenous elements were attached to the group. This is a consubstantial affiliation through women. Likewise, the matrimonial proscriptions that proceed from colactation pacts are a direct allusion to the role of women.

In looking carefully at ancestral representations, one begins to understand that kinship depends on the extent to which individuals recognize their respective masculine and feminine identities. Therefore, rather than reasoning in terms of the paradigmatic opposition between agnation and cognation, it seems preferable to substitute an ingenious combination of the two, as the Ait Khebbach have done.

I thank Janet Cheng for the translation of this essay into English.

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<sup>37</sup> Agabi (1994: 2046) notes that Berbers from the Upper Atlas employ the word *tafergant*, from the verb *freg*, originally meaning "to enclose", as an alternative to the word *tadd'a*.



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In Southeast Morocco, the representations of kinship, as revealed by the study of the Origin myth, are a testimony for the group attachment to uterine values. These values proceed from the

exclusively feminine ancestry up to the eponym ancestro and, also, from the milk-kinship, considered by women as a tve affiliation. In this society, often discoibed as full patrilinear, local perceptions of kinship illustrate the permanent alternance of agnatic ideolgy and uterin references.

Keywords: kinship; myth; uterin values/descent.